

# HINDSIGHT

## Folly Never Led to Fortune Part II

By Jody Morgan

Duxbury deeds and maps of the 19th century do not include street names. Boundaries are described using the names of the abutters as well as distinctive natural features of the landscape. What we now know as Surplus Street existed as a cart track for many years before the town officially accepted it in 1804 as a "Road leading from Benjamin Bosworth's to James Weston's." Although the town was asked to vote on the building of an Alms House in that same year, the decision to construct the Poor House near the end of that route to the meeting house came several years later.

According to tradition, Surplus Street was known as Poverty Lane because it led to the alms house. Perhaps the street had no name at all before the town finally agreed in March of 1818 that the number of the town's poor was sufficient to warrant building and furnishing a residence for them. The annual meeting of that year "voted to set the poor house on the parsonage nigh of Benj. Smith's." The site was opposite the intersection of what became Depot Street and the way from Benjamin Bosworth's to the meeting-house.

In any case, the road we call Surplus also became known as Folly Street as a reminder that folly was the certain path to the poor farm. Personally, I would not like to be introduced as the lady who lives on Poverty Lane. I imagine the farmers and craftsmen of the day who inhabited the area found the label equally offensive.

Changing the name of their street was probably not their primary goal, however, when the residents came to town meeting to secure for their own use some of the surplus federal revenue distributed to Duxbury in 1837. Nor, although one town legend would have it so, was their petition concerned with street repair. Nothing in town records indicates any major

improvement made to a road in that area between the surplus distribution of 1837 and the first reference to the route as Surplus Street in the town meeting notes of 1848.

In fact, nothing supports the story that the street was renamed because the residents of the area were so outspoken concerning their plan for the surplus funds — nothing, that is, in the book of town meeting records that closes with 1840. Despite repeated calls to sell the bank stock purchased with whatever remained of the surplus revenue after the voters

it amongst the Inhabitants of said Town...." And in case that didn't pass, Article 5 phrased the proposition another way and Article 6 proposed that Joseph S. Thomas, John Weston and John Holmes be appointed a committee to take a census of the town for the treasurer to use in apportioning whatever part of the surplus revenue the special town meeting managed to redirect to the residents.

The 134 other signatories may or may not have had a connection with Poverty Lane, but Joseph S. Thomas certain-

was available to take the town census in 1842. Another John Holmes, probably the son born to Nathaniel Holmes Jr. and Anna Prior Holmes in 1798, was prepared to accept that task. A John Holmes served District 1 as School Agent in 1847, '48, and '49.

The house built by John Weston Jr. in 1821 is located at 218 Surplus St. The site was originally part of a larger Weston family farm. Seven children were born in the house to John and his wife, Hannah Soule, before they sold the property and moved

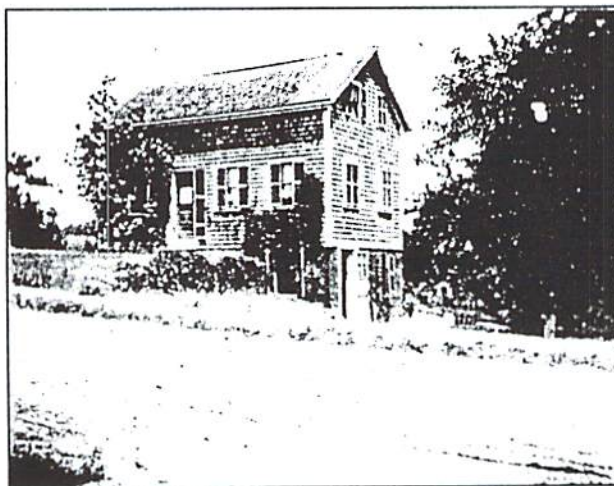
to East Boston in 1835.

Whether the John Weston whose name is linked with those of Joseph S. Thomas and John Holmes at the 1842 special town meeting is the same or a different individual is difficult to determine. However, several of John's children did move back to Duxbury and various members of the Weston family continued to live on Surplus Street.

The affirmative vote taken on Dec. 19, 1842, "to dispose of the surplus revenue invested in bank stock and that it be loaned to each individual in Town according to the population, each individual giving his or her note for the same without interest" was rescinded at another meet-

ing held on Jan. 16, 1843. Even without a record of the dialogue, the heated debate is not hard to imagine.

The residents of Folly Street apparently never received any portion of the surplus revenue for road repairs. Despite their best efforts at tapping the treasury for interest-free loans, the town felt their scheme was founded on folly and refused to grant the inhabitants a borrowed fortune. But they did manage one coup that made the location of their property more attractive to future residents. After all, wouldn't you rather have an address on Surplus Street than a residence on Poverty Lane?



William Henry Weston, born May 15, 1840, was still selling eggs and vegetables from his Surplus Street farm when this 1908 picture was taken. "Bill Hen" knew each of his chickens by name.

Photo Courtesy of Duxbury Rural & Historical Society

dedicated \$2,000 to discharging the town's debt, the investment still stood at the close of 1841. But on Dec. 19 of the following year, a special town meeting was called to deal with a series of articles relating to a scheme for redistributing the wealth.

Article 2 of that warrant best outlines the plan: "To see what order the Town will take in dividing the surplus revenue among the Inhabitants of said Town agreeable to the petition of Joseph S. Thomas and 134 others." Article 4 speaks to a similar project: "To see if the Town will reconsider the vote whereby they took \$2,000 of the surplus revenue and divide

ly did. His 1824 house, built on land belonging to his father-in-law, Bradford Holmes, stands at 14 Surplus St. He sold the house to his father-in-law in 1825 and, according to Dorothy Wentworth's research during the dateboarding of the property, moved to another part of town. He is listed, however, as an elected official for District 1, the Surplus Street neighborhood, serving as "fence viewer" for that portion of Duxbury in 1849.

A John Holmes did buy the Benjamin Bosworth house at 4 Surplus St. along with Ichabod Peterson in 1803. By 1808, John was listed as lost at sea. Neither his ghost nor his heir